

**TESTIMONY OF TERRI DREW,  
DIRECTOR OF STAMFORD YOUTH SERVICES BUREAU,  
JUVENILE REVIEW BOARD AND "PATHWAYS TO ACADEMIC SUCCESS"  
(P.A.S.S.) TRUANCY PROGRAM**

**BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION  
IN SUPPORT OF RAISED S.B. NO. 6499 AN ACT CONCERNING TRUANCY**

**MARCH 7, 2011**

Good afternoon Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. I have a special greeting for Representative Miller who represents my hometown of Stamford.

As the Director of the Stamford Youth Services Bureau, I have had extensive involvement with truancy and juvenile justice issues for the past 7 years. In 2005, I helped establish the Stamford Juvenile Review Board, which diverts first-time juvenile offenders from the court system and re-connects them to their community using the model of Balanced and Restorative Justice. Instead of penalizing young people, we identify the underlying issues that causes them to get into trouble and find solutions based on their strengths. The solutions we use in Stamford include mentoring, community service, tutoring, individual & family therapy, positive activities and other forms of types of restorative justice. Based on my experience, two issues define just about every teen or pre-teen referred to the JRB: habitually truant and failing most classes.

We began to see the need for a specific program designed to address the unique needs of truant students before they get arrested and involved in the juvenile justice system. The P.A.S.S. Program (Pathways to Academic and Social Success) is similar to the JRB in that we conduct panel sessions with community members and work to reconnect the young person back into their family, school and community.

We started the program in the fall of 2009, choosing to pilot it in the middle school from which we had the most JRB referrals. We are working with the guidance counselors and social workers to identify kids that are at risk based on attendance, behavior and grades. We plan to expand the program to all middle schools next year.

**I support the truancy provisions in Raised Bill No. 6499 because it will allow the children we serve to access services more quickly. By requiring schools to file FWSNs within a certain number of days, we will ensure that children are served more efficiently.**

The need for this measure is great. Last year our Juvenile Probation received 50 FWSN reports in May. School ends in June. This does not allow for any intervention to be implemented and successful. It means that those 50 kids started this fall behind

grade level and with no strategies in place to help them be successful for this year. We need to establish uniform practices around the State so that all districts along with SDE can be held accountable for the truancy cases that exist within each district.

This brings me to my proposed amendments:

First, SDE needs to be the central organizing body for truancy programs so that program directors can mount a coordinated effort towards reducing truancy statewide. I've found my participation with Truancy Subcommittee of the FWSN Advisory Board to be extremely valuable to my work in Stamford. I've benefited from the coordination and collaboration this group has created amongst truancy programs statewide by learning about best practices and collaborating with others around the state that are doing this work.

Second, schools should be reporting their truancy efforts to the SDE so that we can keep them accountable in this very important area of the engagement of students. This make school districts even more aware of how seriously the State of Connecticut takes the problem of truancy. In addition, it will allow districts that are successful in their efforts to share their strategies, and will allow struggling districts to get the help they need in engaging students statewide.

Respectfully submitted,

Terri Drew  
Director, Stamford Youth Services Bureau  
Government Center  
888 Washington Blvd., 6<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Stamford, CT